



Creating Opportunity in Higher Education



WASHINGTON

STATE

HIGHER

EDUCATION

COORDINATING

BOARD

The Washington State GEAR UP Program

Background

Low-income, disadvantaged students are less likely to graduate from high school and go on to college. Many mistakenly believe that college is too expensive or otherwise out of their reach. Others want to go to college but don't know how to navigate the higher education system. With one counselor for every 535 students, schools often can't provide the one-on-one guidance that many of these students need.

Consider the following:

- 1 in 7 Washington children lives in poverty.
- 1 in 3 Washington children comes from a family that cannot afford basic necessities.
- 1 in 4 of the state's high school students drops out; most come from lower-income families.
- Nearly half of all Washington residents without a high school diploma or GED live in poverty.¹

Studies show that early intervention works. Students from low-income families who receive extra financial, academic, and social support are more likely to stay in school and go on to college. In Washington State, 87 percent of those who participated in a five-year National Early Intervention Scholarship and Partnership (NEISP) program

stayed in high school. About 40 of the 60 students who began the program in 10th grade went on to college.

Program Overview

With the help of a \$15.6 million, five-year federal grant, the Washington State GEAR UP Program is focused on helping more students from disadvantaged backgrounds go on to college. GEAR UP stands for "Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs."

The Higher Education Coordinating Board, in partnership with the University of Washington and the Office of the Governor, administers two early intervention projects: 1) the GEAR UP Scholars Project and 2) the GEAR UP State and Partnership Coordination Project. Federal funding is expected to last through June 2004.

The Scholars Project

The Scholars Project ultimately will provide year-round, direct service to 1,200 at-risk students in grades 7 through 12; another 5,000 at-risk students will participate in early outreach activities. Students are typically the first in their families to think about or pursue higher education.

917 Lakeridge Way SW
P.O. Box 43430
Olympia, WA 98504-3430
Phone: (360) 753-7800
Fax: (360) 753-7808
Email: info@hecb.wa.gov
www.hecb.wa.gov

¹Washington State Institute for Public Policy, 1991.

All come from low-income communities around the state with high numbers of at-risk youth. The program currently serves students in Aberdeen, Hoquiam, Elma, Inchelium, Spokane, Tacoma and Wapato and will expand later this year to serve students in Seattle, Taholah, Yakima, and Quincy.

Project staff offer the academic, social and financial support students need to pursue higher education. They provide academic preparation and tutoring, career exploration and information about college. Communities contribute time, space, and thousands of volunteer hours annually to help ensure the students' success.

Students can earn stipends and scholarships for up to four years of postsecondary study. In return, they must remain drug-, crime- and alcohol-free; maintain at least a 2.0 grade point average; and participate in community service projects. In addition, parents or student sponsors are required to devote 40 hours or more annually to the program.

The Coordination Project

The Coordination Project builds partnerships to support the Scholars Project and other early intervention projects by: 1) establishing linkages

among K-12 schools, higher education, state and local governments, businesses, community organizations, and educational outreach organizations, and 2) developing new curricula and early intervention strategies for serving students, families and schools that can be replicated statewide and nationally.

Specifically, the Coordination Project will oversee the following initiatives to increase higher education enrollment among low-income students:

- Host annual summer institutes at the UW and field trips to other campuses to expose students to the college experience.
- Create publications about the importance of higher education, college planning and the availability of financial aid, and distribute them to participating students in grades 7 through 12 and their families.
- Improve K-12 teaching and learning to help students develop the academic skills they will need for admission to and success in college.
- Offer institutes, seminars and training materials to help teachers improve classroom strategies, and infuse curricula with positive messages about higher education.